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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 000815

SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE. NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/PASCUAL

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SUBJECT: BARRIER CUTS OFF BIDDU AND JABA' FROM JERUSALEM

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Mayor of Biddu Ismail Qadan told Poloffs April 30 that the separation barrier cuts off Biddu residents from 4,000 dunums (1,000 acres) of land and 5,000 olive trees. He said the GoI recently completed a tunnel that shortens the drive from Biddu to Ramallah but required the expropriation of 200 dunums (50 acres) of land. Mayor of Jaba' Abd al-Karim Bisharat told Poloffs April 30 that the separation barrier isolates Jaba' from Jerusalem and has caused unemployment to reach 65 percent. End Summary.

Barrier Cuts Off Biddu Land

¶2. (C) Ismail Qadan, Mayor of Biddu (pop: 8,500), told Poloffs April 30 that the separation barrier cuts off Biddu residents from 4,000 dunums (1,000 acres) of land and 5,000 olive trees. He said the IDF requires permits for Biddu residents to cross through four gates in the barrier to access their land. Qadan commented, however, that all residents who have applied for permits have been refused. Local council member Mufida Hamaidan said Biddu residents who own land inside the barrier and do not have gate permits must therefore take a long route around the barrier to access their lands. She said many farmers have stopped harvesting their crops in recent years, because it is difficult to carry their produce back to Biddu, and they instead buy vegetables at the market. Qadan said he has an upcoming meeting with the Beit El Civil Administration to discuss permits.

¶3. (C) Qadan said the GoI recently completed a tunnel, connecting Biddu to Ramallah, that runs below the separation barrier and 443, an Israeli-only road linking Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Qadan said the previously one hour drive to Ramallah now takes 15 minutes. He said, however, that the IDF expropriated 200 dunums (50 acres) of Biddu lands to build the tunnel. (Note: Qadan was elected mayor in 2005 and heads an eleven-person council with five Fatah members, four Hamas, and two DFLP. Qadan is Fatah and also heads the Council for Joint Services for ten villages northwest of Jerusalem. End Note).

Unemployment Pushes Women into Workforce

¶4. (C) Hamaidan said unemployment and domestic violence are high in Biddu. She urged the local council to build a women's center to teach embroidery and cooking skills and said 250 women from Biddu and eight surrounding villages now use the center. Hamaidan also started a program to prepare housewives for high school exams and encourages them to go to university. She arranged for a female doctor to come to the Biddu clinic once a week to see up to 40 female patients for 5 NIS (1.50 USD) each. She said Biddu residents receive a limited amount of water from Har Adar settlement and from municipal water tanks, but the village still faces a water shortage. Hamaidan said "the council works as a team and my

male colleagues generally welcome my ideas.

Barrier Isolates Jaba' from Jerusalem

15. (C) Abd al-Krim Bisharat, Mayor of Jaba' (pop: 4,500), told Ploffs April 30 that Jaba' land was expropriated for construction of the separation barrier in 2004. He said the barrier has pushed unemployment in Jaba' to 65 percent. Council member Lyla Bisharatsaid, "Jaba' is marginalized. We are so close to Jerusalem, yet feel so far away because of the wall." Council member Basila Abd al-Latif said the barrier cut off Jaba' laborers from the Jerusalem job market and forced women to seek work outside the home. As a result, Abd al-Latif said the council has provided women with job training.

16. (C) Bisharat said the municipality is struggling for money. Its yearly income is generated from residents' fees for water, electricity, and building licenses and 150,000 NIS (42,857 USD) from the PA. Bisharat also said Jaba' is in Area B, but PA security forces cannot access the town because they must cross through Area C, where the GoI has civil and security control. Bisharat noted that without a police force, locals take matters into their own hands. (Note: Bisharat was elected mayor in 2005 and heads a nine-person council with seven Fatah members and two PFLP. Bisharat is Fatah and was "mukhtar" or village leader of Jaba' from 1975-1996 and was appointed mayor from 1996-2005. End Note).

Comment

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17. (C) In these and other meetings, local officials expressed significant appreciation for USG visits, which are notable because few USG officials have reached these small villages in recent years. Many of these meetings were a working level review of MEPI small grants, but the mayor also presented village concerns and pressed for increased USG engagement. One female council member wrote that the Poloffs' visit "let me gain confidence in front of the other municipality members ... and I had a feeling of strength that will push me to serve the people of my country."

WALLES